IF WE CAN'T DO THE EASY STUFF, WE'RE GOING TO FAIL

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Body

The following information was released by Action on Smoking and Health (ASH):

April 22 is Earth Day, the day we recognize that Earth is our only home. Like a house, if we don't take care of it, clean up messes and fix things when they're broken, it will become uninhabitable. Unlike a house, we can't simply collect the insurance and go get another one.

One of the biggest messes humans have made is cigarette butts, the world's number one source of toxic garbage and plastic waste. Every year, 4.5 trillion butts enter the environment. Discarded vapes are rapidly multiplying as well. Collectively, we call this tobacco product waste. In spite of the fact that this waste is associated with products that harm health and give nothing but addiction in return we've done almost nothing to get it out of our house.

True, there are organized cleanups that collect millions of butts every year. By my back-of-the-envelope calculations, cleanups account for roughly 0.00000002% of butts discarded each year. That is close enough to zero to just call it zero. As for the few butts that are collected, what can we do with them? They are toxic and unrecyclable. I am not criticizing the good people who volunteer to clean up our beaches and parks. They know they can't solve the problem, but they are taking action and raising awareness.

Some of the things that will be necessary to beat climate change will be painful and require hard trade-offs. But tobacco product waste is not one of those things, and is an obvious place to start.

We know exactly how to fix this problem stop allowing the sale of tobacco products.

There are positive signs. In addition to the 22 U.S. jurisdictions that have banned or are phasing out the sale of all tobacco products, last year Santa Cruz County in California became the first place to ban the sale of cigarette filters. Several countries in Europe have banned single-use vapes.

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